
Racial Preferences in Internet Dating: A Comparison of Four Birth Cohorts

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Abstract

Does the willingness to date interracially cut across different cohorts? Using data from a sample of Internet daters, the present study examines the race dating preferences of four distinct birth cohorts, the Silent Generation (individuals born in 1942 or before), the Baby Boomers (those born between 1943 and 1960), Generation X (those born between 1961 and 1981), and the Millennium Generation (those born after 1981). Although members from each group have had varying experiences with legalized segregation— especially during the formative years of their adulthood— no research to date has specifically compared these four birth cohorts in regards to their current dating preferences. The findings reveal that members of the oldest generation (Silent Generation) were consistently less willing to date anyone outside their racial group, except when whites were the response variable. Analysis also showed that whites and Asians are unwilling to date African Americans. At the same time, African Americans are resistant to dating whites, but Asians prefer dating whites. Overall results are discussed in relation to both the historical and present socio-cultural racial climate, and how the importance of cohort effects may shape racial dating preferences.

Few would dispute that dating preferences are consistently shaped by various social institutions and psychological factors (Dalmage 2006; Gullickson 2006; Yancey 2002). This is especially true for interracial relationships. In a society that has created and maintained a racial hierarchy for centuries, crossing the color-line when selecting a mate has met with varying levels of approbation (Barnett 1963; Childs 2002; Zabel 1964). For instance, between 1876 and 1964, the era generally known as “Jim Crow,” individuals were actively discouraged from mixing interracially. During this period, roughly thirty-eight states had anti-miscegenation laws in place to aggressively punish racial/ethnic transgressors. Even in the late 1960s, the twilight of Jim Crow, public support for prohibiting race mixing ran high,

as over 72% of Southern whites and 42% of northern whites supported a ban on interracial relationships (Kennedy 1997). Combined with strong feelings of prejudice, these discriminatory laws were effective at enforcing racial homophily.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally dismantled Jim Crow. Nevertheless, public attitudes about racial mixing have been somewhat more resistant to change (Dalmage 2006). One measure of the improvement of race relations in the United States is interracial marriage, and researchers continue to take the pulse of American race relations by investigating interracial marriage patterns (Jacobs and Labov 2002; Johnson and Jacobson 2005; Miller, Olson, and Fazio 2004; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995). Many social scientists argue



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that mixed marriage rates act as a barometer of racial tolerance and acceptance (see e.g., Aldridge 1978; Blau 1994; Gordon 1964), and, as a result, most studies of intimate interracial relations have focused on marriage rather than dating. Although the amount of research on interracial dating is starting to increase, a lacuna continues to exist in the literature concerning the topic. Because there is no necessary correspondence between interracial dating and interracial marriage, what we know about intermarriage may not generalize to interracial daters (Fujino 1997; Yancey 2002).

Over the past few years, however, researchers have begun to pay more attention to interracial dating. For instance, in a recent study, Yancey (2002) found that 35.7% of all whites in the United States, 56.5% of African Americans, 55.4% of Hispanics, and 57.1% of all Asians have dated someone of a different race. Although earlier figures on the numbers of couples dating interracially are hard to come by, the increase in interracial marriages and anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of couples dating across racial and ethnic lines is, in fact, increasing as well. Some attribute the increasing number of mixed-race partners to demographic and cultural shifts that are currently occurring in our society (Chideya 2006). Racial diversity in the United States is at an all-time high (Prewitt 2001), creating greater opportunity for contact between racially-diverse populations. Moreover, previously considered to be a taboo topic, intimate relationships between members of different racial and ethnic groups are increasingly featured in the popular media (Frutkin 2002). Although it would appear that increased interracial exposure has made it more acceptable to enter into race-mixed unions, there remain gaps in the research literature on such dating practice. One such gap involves the question of the intergenerational willingness to date someone of another race or ethnicity. Specifically, would a person raised in the middle of the 20th century, considered to be the twilight of the Jim Crow era, be as interested in dating a person of a different race or ethnicity as would someone coming of age in later, more racially diverse, and, at least in a legal sense, more racially-tolerant time periods?

We address this question using data from a nationwide sample of Internet daters. In this study, we examine the interracial dating preferences of four distinct birth cohorts, the *Silent Generation* (individuals born in 1942 or before), the *Baby Boomers* (those born between 1943 and 1960), *Generation X* (those born between 1961 and 1981), and the *Millennium Generation* (those born after 1981). As we discuss below, each of

these cohorts have different experiences with legalized discrimination, as laws have become progressively more racially liberal and culture has become progressively more diverse over time. Nevertheless, to date, no research has specifically compared the racial/ethnic component of the current dating preferences of these cohorts in an attempt to ascertain generational effects on those preferences. Incorporating relevant covariates, including racial/ethnic background, region, sexual and political orientations, religious preference, and level of education, we will examine the willingness of members of each of these cohorts to date outside of their own race or ethnicity. The present study will also add to the literature by analyzing the dating preferences of multiracial individuals (those who self-identify with more than one racial/ethnic group), a growing, yet understudied segment of the U.S. population. Findings will be discussed in relation to both the historical and present socio-cultural racial climate, focusing on the extent to which cohort effects play a part in shaping racial dating preferences.

Past Research

Historical Trends in Interracial Relationships

The decision to cross the color-line when selecting a mate does not exist in a social vacuum. As research has shown, the socio-cultural environment plays an important role in discouraging or facilitating interracial romantic relationships (Childs 2002; Kalmijin 1998). For example, during the early colonial period, when skin color was not consciously used as a cue to status and racial propinquity was high, sexual contact between blacks and whites was quite common (Gullickson 2006). However, as slavery became more institutionalized, certain physical features quickly became visible markers for subordination and oppression. Many dark skinned individuals (especially in the South) were viewed as being chattel rather than potential spouses, or intimate dating partners. Anti-miscegenation laws were also actively instituted, further increasing the social distance between different racial groups and preventing racial minorities from attaining the cultural status of whites (Cox 1959). These statutes essentially provided a legal foundation for the preservation of a "we / they" dichotomy.

Although the institution of slavery was eventually dismantled, white supremacy, segregation, and violence against racial minorities were more difficult to dislodge. During what is known as the Jim Crow era, racism, at

both the individual and institutional levels, supported the maintenance of a racial caste system. As described by Brown and colleagues:

The defining feature of Jim Crow was the subordination and oppression of African Americans, the conscious use of political and economic power to impose upon them the badge of inferiority and to establish white supremacy. . . . [D]e jure segregation was instrumental in creating and maintaining a deeply rooted system of pervasive white privilege that extended to the North. Whites in both regions of the country maintain these privileges by law, by conscious acts of discrimination, and by racial violence. (Brown 2003:163)

Not surprisingly, during this time period, the number of mixed race relationships reached their lowest point in history (Gullickson 2006). Some researchers (e.g., Barnett 1963; Golden 1958) attribute this particular outcome to four interrelated factors: (1) A highly segregated social structure—racial minorities were often segregated in the labor market, schools, and neighborhoods. This physical separation discouraged any meaningful contact or interactions with whites; (2) A cultural system that discriminated against people who crossed the color-line— psychological and physical sanctions, from menacing stares to physical attacks, were often leveled against racial/ethnic transgressors; (3) Racist laws—more than 30 states in the U.S. had adopted laws to prohibit interracial marriage; and (4) Parents socializing their children to practice racial homophily—racial boundaries were often constructed and learned within the family. Taken together, these four factors reinforced the notion that racial minorities were culturally and intellectually inferior to whites. Marrying or dating someone of a different race essentially meant breaking with conventional racist norms and, as a result, risking social (and often legal) sanctions (Johnson and Jacobson 2005).

The gradual transition from segregation to civil rights was highlighted by the landmark court decision, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, which seemingly ushered in a new era, one that promoted equality for all racial minorities in almost every sphere of life. From fair housing to equal employment opportunity, subsequent legislation began to slowly chip away at the vestiges of slavery. With the elimination of the national origins quota system, the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, and the banning of anti-miscegenation laws via *Loving vs. Virginia*, racial minorities were afforded more opportunities to meet and interact with whites; thus, as might

be expected, there was a steady, albeit small, increase in interracial marriage rates (Fujino 1997; Gullickson 2006). Importantly, however, the end of Jim Crow did not signify general racial acceptance, nor was tolerance instantly achieved. Although some legislative acts were effective at restricting or regulating behaviors (e.g., overt employment and housing discrimination), it was a different story altogether when it came to changing long standing attitudes and beliefs. Widespread racial animosity and apathy continued to prevail— especially in the South—during the 1970s and 1980s (Steeh and Schuman 1992).

The United States is currently experiencing a substantial demographic and cultural shift. Racial propinquity is at an all time high, with people of color becoming, or on the verge of becoming, the numerical majority in many metropolitan areas. Young Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 are the most racially diverse generation ever. As described by Chideya:

The teens and twenty-somethings of the Millennium Generation are the true experts on the future of race, because they're re-creating America's racial identity every single day. They're more likely to interact with people of other races and backgrounds than other generations, and they've grown up seeing multi-ethnic images. Critically important, a third of this generation is non-white, not just black, but Asian, Latino, Native American and multi-racial. (Chideya 2006: 13)

Race-mixing opportunities have moved into residential neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and the World Wide Web, where they have flourished (Houston et al 2005). The intimate, personal, and increasingly egalitarian contact between different racial groups has produced increasingly positive attitudes and behaviors toward race-mixing in intimate relationships (Johnson and Jacobson 2005). The 2000 U.S. Census also revealed that the number of interracial marriages significantly increased from 157,000 to 1.6 million between 1960 and 2002 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998; 2003). More than 50% of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians have dated someone of a different race; only whites continue to date predominantly within their own racial group (Yancey 2002). With ongoing racial diversification and trends toward multiculturalism in the United States, these patterns of interracial relating are likely to continue. Moreover, recent trends in dating, such as the use of the Internet for meeting prospective mates, has opened up additional opportunities for meeting potential partners from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The On-Line Romantic Market

Over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st, intimate partnering has become increasingly individualistic. With companionate marriage as the ideal, potential partners are valued for their ability to fulfill not only physical needs but emotional needs for affection and camaraderie. With procreation decreasing as a functional requisite of marriage, the "pure relationship" has become increasingly important, and relationships remain viable only for as long as each partner is able to fulfill the desires of the other (Giddens 1992). In this relationship context, increasing emphasis is placed on the romantic market, where individuals "trade" in personal, social, and cultural capital to find a mate with characteristics that they believe will fulfill their own relationship needs and desires.

One dilemma of dating in a traditional romantic market has been identifying potential partners who have these desirable characteristics. Opportunity pools for possible mates have generally been limited by propinquity, and individuals have, therefore, been restricted to finding mates in their neighborhoods, schools, or jobs. Longstanding patterns of racial segregation have, moreover, made these sites historically homogeneous and opportunities for meeting racially different significant others have been limited. Besides the limited opportunity for contact with heterogeneous potential partners, traditional patterns of courtship have tended to camouflage the bargaining and trade-offs involved in shopping for a romantic partner, and, as a result of embedded power relations, one "shopper" (usually the woman) has generally been disadvantaged in relation to the other on the romantic market (Coltrane & Collins, 2001).

Recently, however, communication and technological revolutions have opened up new venues for romantic markets. "Guessing games" about a potential partner's resources and deficits have given way, in many instances, to overt "advertising" about what is being offered by one individual and what is being sought from another in a romantic exchange. Newspaper personal columns, initial sites for this new form of "overt" romantic bargaining (see, for example, Goode 1996), have now largely given way to on-line dating services.

With the ubiquity of the World Wide Web, internet dating has taken off in recent years, with popular on-line dating sites such as eHarmony.com, AmericanSingles.com, and match.com providing a venue for a substantial number of romance "shoppers" (see, for instance, Hardey, 2002). Rather than a romantic market, on-line

dating now provides a huge virtual romantic shopping mall. Personal profiles posted on internet dating sites allow for overt advertising of specific personal resources and preferences; pictures posted along with the profiles provide a visual tool for shoppers to assess the veracity of resource claims and the visual appeal of possible matches. All of this shopping takes place without the personal and emotional investment involved in meeting and accepting/rejecting another person. Investment begins and market bargaining situations are created when on-line shoppers respond to romantic "possibles" with a profile of their own detailed resources and preferences.

Not unlike traditional forms of face-to-face courting practice, there are opportunities for deception in the context of the internet dating market (Adam 2005). Nevertheless, in many ways on-line dating sites can provide a more direct and open venue for the bargaining that is important in the modern romantic market. Power dynamics may be reduced when the bargains are overt rather than hidden (see, for instance, Komter 1989), and traditionally disempowered groups (racial minorities and women) may find themselves empowered when bargaining is explicit. In this context, race/ethnicity and age are among the personal characteristics (resources) advertised by the hopeful dater in their on-line profile; moreover, a dating hopeful can advertise for the racial/ethnic background of their "successful" romantic match.

Internet dating site users' deployment of race/ethnicity as both a personal resource and as a characteristic in a desired mate provides a unique opportunity for social scientists interested in the social dynamics of race and ethnicity. As noted previously, interracial dating and marriage patterns tend to reflect patterns of racial/ethnic tolerance. Moreover, because age is another resource listed by internet daters in their dating profiles, patterns of racial/ethnic dating bias can be studied by age cohort. In this study, we examine the racial/dating preferences (biases) of internet daters based on their own racial/ethnic background and their age cohort.

Generational Differences in Attitudes and Behaviors

Although the racial climate has improved dramatically since the 1950s and 1960s, it is still unclear, however, what effect the historical circumstance of legalized discrimination has had on present day racial attitudes and behaviors of adults who lived through the twilight of Jim Crow. Some theorists such as Karl Mannheim

([1928] 1952) have argued that individuals are more sensitive to historical events that occur during the "critical period of the life course" than to events that transpire later in life. Mannheim's theory of generations posits that beliefs, values, and norms that were acquired and shaped by critical events during the formative years of early adulthood (mid-teens to early 20s), may produce "a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time" (Eyerman and Turner 1998: 93). Seminal events serve to crystallize personal identities and social awareness, creating a distinctive generational outlook that persists throughout the life course (Griffin 2004; Shuman and Scott 1989). Consequently, older generations may interpret and respond to new situations using perspectives that were structured decades earlier. As Huyck (2001: 13) states, "[i]ndividuals who are now older bring with them attitudes and standards of the years when they were growing up and establishing adult relationships." Collective memories from adolescence and early adulthood help to shape present day attitudes, emotions, dispositions, preferences, and practices (Eyerman and Turner 1998).

For example, consistent with Mannheim's theory, Lyons and colleagues (2005) found that members from the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X differed significantly in their value priorities. Generation Xers (individuals born between 1965 and 1979) placed more importance on hedonism (pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself), stimulation (excitement and challenge in life), and self-direction (independent thought and action) than did Baby Boomers (people born between 1945 and 1964). On the other hand, Baby Boomers were more likely to stress tradition (respect, commitment, and acceptance of traditional culture or religion) and conformity (restraint on actions and impulses) than were their younger counterparts. Lyons and colleagues argue that these differing value priorities reflected the formative socio-historical contexts in which these individuals were raised. For instance, unlike Baby Boomers, Generation Xers were reared in an age of rapid technological change, increased cultural diversity, economic uncertainty, and family instability (increased divorce rates and "latch-key" children). The combination of these events pushed many Generation Xers to be independent and entrepreneurial (Zemke et al. 2000). Consequently, it is not surprising to find that this particular cohort tends to value self-direction and stimulation rather than conformity and tradition (Lyons et al 2005).

Based on the discussion above, in the present study, we hypothesize that the "Silent Generation"

(those individuals over 60 years of age) will exhibit a greater tendency to date within their own racial or ethnic group than will those from later cohorts. As discussed, members from the different cohorts have had significantly different experiences with legalized segregation. Whereas older daters experienced legalized segregation firsthand, members of later cohorts have been less likely to do so. Since socio-historical events predispose members of a certain generation to subscribe to specific beliefs and values that are consistent with the "times" in which they were young adults, we would anticipate differences in interracial dating preferences between the four cohorts.

Methods

Data and Sample

The present study utilized data collected from *Match.com* (the largest online dating service in the United States with over 15 million subscribers) in the winter of 2006. Information was gleaned from the personal ads of randomly selected users who had completed a dating profile/survey consisting of a combination of both closed and open-ended type questions. This "electronic dossier," which is free and accessible to all users who have Internet access, highlights such things as the dater's background, physical features, personality traits, interests, values, socioeconomic status, and the characteristics and qualities that the individual is seeking in his or her dating partner(s). In regards to the latter, besides desired physical features and mutual interests, users are also prompted to indicate (by checking the appropriate box or boxes) which racial or ethnic group(s) they prefer to date. Users also have the option to post a headshot photo, and to write narratives about themselves and their ideal match.

In order to obtain a diverse sample of daters (ages 18 and over) in the United States, a multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, the largest U.S. city (based on the latest census figures) in every state was selected for inclusion. Metropolitan areas tend to provide single individuals with a large pool of available dating partners from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. To ensure racial/ethnic diversity in the sample, twenty sub-sampling categories were developed (e.g., "white male seeking female," "white female seeking male," "white male seeking male," and "white female seeking female"). These four groupings were also created for African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and multiracial individuals (respondents

who selected more than one racial or ethnic category). To facilitate the sampling process, personal ads were stratified into their appropriate sub-sampling category via a sorting feature on *Match.com* that allows users to filter data based on various social characteristics such as race and ethnic background and sexual orientation. The population of daters was further narrowed by excluding all ads that did not include a picture of the respondent. As is often the case, individuals who do not post picture(s) of themselves are less likely to fully complete their online dating survey/profile than are their pictured counterparts.

Fifteen respondents were randomly sampled for each sub-sampling grouping, for a total of 300 individuals per state. It is important to note, however, that if a particular sub-sampling category had less than 15 people within it, all respondents in that particular category were included in the dataset. In addition some sampling categories for certain cities did not have any respondents to sample from.

Since older daters (ages 60+) are a minority group on *Match.com*, an additional sampling strategy was employed to ensure that a sizable sample was obtained. First, all personal ads (with a picture) posted by daters 60 years or over were isolated from younger daters by using the appropriate sorting function. Next, fifty individuals were randomly sampled from the two sexual orientation groupings. A total of 200 non-duplicated respondents were added to the larger dataset.

Using a standardized coding sheet, twelve trained coders recorded responses from 14 relevant closed ended questions. A total of 12,317 dating profiles were coded and entered into an SPSS database. The effective sample size is based on the number of cases on which complete information was available. Table 1 presents summary statistics for the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Covariates	N	Mean	SD	Covariates	N	Mean	SD
Willing to Date Black	3827	.555	.496	Level of Education			
Willing to Date White	5007	.873	.332	High School	1193	.101	.302
Willing to Date Hispanic	5311	.743	.436	Some College	4994	.423	.494
Willing to Date Asian	4512	.612	.487	College	3387	.287	.452
Race / Ethnicity				Graduate	2207	.187	.390
Black	2315	.188	.390	Political Orientation			
White	3768	.306	.461	Conservative	1059	.117	.321
Hispanic	2204	.179	.383	Moderate	3738	.413	.492
Asian	1736	.141	.348	Liberal	3150	.348	.476
Multiple Race	2265	.184	.387	Other	1086	.120	.325
Generation				Religious Affiliation			
Millennium	1145	.093	.291	No Religion	497	.042	.202
Silent	332	.027	.163	Catholic	2650	.224	.417
Baby Boomer	2572	.209	.407	Protestant	1396	.118	.323
Generation X	8234	.669	.470	Jewish	106	.009	.097
Sex				Other Religion	7145	.604	.489
Male	6528	.530	.499	Region of Residence			
Female	5778	.469	.499	West	4014	.326	.468
Sexual Orientation				South	3373	.274	.446
Heterosexual	7858	.638	.480	Midwest	2278	.185	.388
Homosexual	4459	.362	.480	Northeast	2623	.213	.409

Approximately 30% of the respondents identified themselves as white, African American, 18%, Asian American, 14%, Hispanic, 17%, and multi-racial or ethnic, 18%. Two percent of the sample were from the Silent Generation (ages 61 – 78), while 20%, 66%, and 9% were from the Baby Boomer Generation (ages 43 – 60), Generation X (ages 22 – 42), and the Millennium Generation (ages 18 – 21), respectively. The majority of daters were males (53%) and heterosexuals (64%). Forty-six percent of the sample had completed college. In regards to political orientation, 41% of the respondents indicated that they were moderate, whereas 34% and 11% mentioned that they were liberal and conservative, respectively. With regard to religious affiliation, 22% and 11% of online daters were Catholic and Protestant, respectively. Interestingly, however, more than 60% of the sample indicated their religious affiliation as being “other.” Finally, a significant portion of the respondents resided in both the Southern (27%) and western regions (32%) of the United States.

When asked about their dating preferences, 55% of the respondents (excluding Blacks) indicated that they would date an African American, while fifty percent (excluding Asians) revealed that they would date an Asian (61%), and 71% (excluding Hispanics) indicated preference for dating Hispanics. An overwhelming 87% of the respondents (excluding whites) reported that they would select a white person as a potential dating partner.

Variables and Measures

Four dependent variables were used to assess the degree to which respondents were willing to date African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Whites. Each outcome variable was scored as a dichotomy, assigning ‘1’ to respondents who indicated that they would be willing to date individuals of a certain race or ethnicity, and ‘0’ for those who would not. When a particular group was the target of the question, that group was removed from the analysis. For instance, in the question: Would you be willing to date a black person, African Americans were removed. Likewise, Hispanics were removed when respondents were asked if they would date a Hispanic person.

Race/ethnicity was measured by four dummy variables, one each for African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and multiple race individuals (respondents who had checked two or more of the racial/ethnic categories on their online profile). Reference groups

varied depending on the dependent variable and which group was temporarily deleted from the analysis. For example, when the dependent variable was willingness to date Blacks, the group for comparison comprised Hispanics. The various reference categories are depicted in the respective tables.

Based on general birth years associated with specific generations, *age* was used to create four dummy generation variables. Respondents who were between the ages of 61 to 78 were identified as being members of the *Silent Generation*. *Baby Boomers* consisted of individuals who were 43 to 60 years of age. Daters between the ages of 22 to 42 represented *Generation X*. Finally, members of the *Millennium Generation* were individuals between the ages of 18 to 21 and the latter were the reference group.

Sex and *sexual orientation* were both collapsed into dummy variables, *female* and *homosexual*, respectively. Males constituted the reference group for sex, and heterosexuals were the omitted category for sexual orientation. *Level of Education* was measured by a series of dummy variables, ‘some college,’ ‘completed college,’ and ‘graduate school.’ Those with a ‘high school’ education were the reference group. Individuals who had checked “school of life” on their online profile were removed from the analysis.

Political orientation was recoded from a seven-category typology (ultra conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, very liberal, non-conformist, and some other viewpoint) into three dummy variables, ‘moderate,’ ‘liberal,’ and ‘some other political orientation’ (included non-conformist). Individuals who fell within the specified category were assigned ‘1’ and those who did not were coded ‘0.’ Respondents who identified themselves as being ‘conservative’ were the omitted group. *Region of residence* was also delimited by three dummy variables, ‘South,’ ‘Midwest,’ and ‘Northeast’ (based on the U.S. Census state/region designations). Individuals who resided in the West (the most racially diverse region) were the reference category.

In its original form, *religious affiliation* consisted of ten categories, ranging from ‘atheist’ to ‘Muslim/Islam.’ Five dummy variables were created, one each for ‘no religion’ (which included ‘agnostic,’ ‘atheist,’ and ‘spiritual but not religious’), ‘Catholic,’ ‘Protestant,’ ‘Jewish,’ and ‘other religion’ (which included ‘Buddhist/Taoist,’ ‘Hindu,’ ‘Muslim/Islam,’ and ‘other’).

Statistical Modeling

Due to the fact that each response variable is categorical, logistic regression models were fitted to the data. For each variable, parameter estimates (β s) reflect the log of the odds of being in one category of the dependent variable (coded 1) as opposed to being in the other category (coded 0). The likelihood of race/ethnic preference in dating is reported in the form of an odds ratio (OR). Estimated odds ratios were obtained by exponentiating the logistic regression coefficients. An OR greater than 1 indicates that the odds of stating a racial/ethnic dating preference are higher for the covariate category (included in the model), compared to the reference group. On the other hand, an OR of less than 1 has the opposite interpretation.

Findings

Relevant logistic regression results of the effects of the covariates on willingness to date African Americans

are presented in model 1 of Table 2. As may be seen in the table, both whites and Asians were much less willing to date African Americans than Hispanics. Specifically, Asians were 31% and whites were nearly 24% less likely to indicate they would date African Americans. Persons of multi-racial backgrounds were nearly 1.4 times as likely to favor dating African Americans as Hispanic respondents. Results also showed significant generational differences in Black dating preference. Respondents from the Silent Generation were less willing to date African Americans than persons belonging to the youngest generation (Millennium). Likewise Baby-boomers were considerably less inclined to date African Americans than members of the Millennium generation. Similarly, Generation X respondents expressed significant unwillingness to date African Americans. Although all generational groups were against dating African Americans the relative magnitude of the odds ratios provide evidence to suggest that the degree of resistance declined with generations, with the oldest generation showing the lowest odds of attitudes in favor of dating African Americans.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Results of the Effects of Race/Ethnicity and Generation on the Willingness to Date Blacks and Whites

Model 1 Willing to Date Black				Model 2 Willing to Date White			
Covariates	b	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Covariates	b	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Race / Ethnicity				Race / Ethnicity			
Hispanic		1.00		Hispanic		1.00	
White	-0.27***	0.76	0.66,0.88	Black	-1.55***	0.21	0.16,0.28
Asian	-0.34***	0.69	0.58,0.86	Asian	0.83***	2.30	1.52,3.46
Multiple Race	0.31***	1.36	1.16,1.59	Multiple Race	-0.26	0.77	0.58,1.03
Generation				Generation			
Millennium		1.00		Millennium		1.00	
Silent	-1.09***	0.34	0.24,0.48	Silent	-0.24	0.79	0.40,1.54
Baby Boomer	-0.37**	0.69	0.57,0.86	Baby Boomer	-0.33	0.72	0.50,1.03
Gen X	-0.16	0.85	0.70,1.03	Gen X	-0.04	0.96	0.70,1.33
Sex				Sex			
Male		1.00		Male		1.00	
Female	-0.15**	0.86	0.78,0.95	Female	-0.66***	0.52	0.43,0.62
Sexual Orientation				Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual		1.00		Heterosexual		1.00	
Homosexual	0.06	1.06	0.94,1.18	Homosexual	0.27**	1.30	1.07,1.59
Level of Education				Level of Education			
High School		1.00		High School		1.00	
Some College	-0.94*	0.82	0.68,1.00	Some College	-0.01	0.99	0.71,1.37
College	-0.14	0.87	0.71,1.06	College	0.17	1.19	0.84,1.69
Graduate	-0.11	0.90	0.73,1.11	Graduate	0.46	1.05	0.72,1.51
Political Orientation				Political Orientation			
Conservative		1.00		Conservative		1.00	
Moderate	0.29***	1.34	1.14,1.58	Moderate	0.46***	1.59	1.21,2.08
Liberal	0.72***	2.17	1.82,2.59	Liberal	0.27**	1.31	0.99,1.74
Other	0.79***	2.06	1.72,2.45	Other	0.11	1.12	0.81,1.54
Religious Affiliation				Religious Affiliation			
No Religion		1.00		No Religion		1.00	
Catholic	-0.34**	0.71	0.56,0.90	Catholic	-1.55***		
Protestant	-0.33**	0.72	0.55,0.93	Protestant	-0.34	0.71	0.39,1.29
Jewish	-0.57*	0.57	0.35,0.91	Jewish	-0.60	0.55	0.11,2.73
Other Religion	-0.02	0.98	0.78,1.22	Other Religion	-0.25	0.78	0.45,1.36
Region of Residence				Region of Residence			
West		1.00		West		1.00	
South	-0.58***	0.56	0.49,0.64	South	-0.74***	0.48	0.80,0.61
Midwest	-0.41	0.96	0.83,1.10	Midwest	-0.49***	0.61	0.47,0.80
Northeast	0.62	1.06	0.93,1.22	Northeast	-0.45***	0.64	0.49,0.83
-2 Log Likelihood	9129.085				3554.273		
Model χ^2 / df	520.112*** / 21				583.866*** / 21		
Number of Events / Observations	3827 / 7004				5007 / 5681		

*** Significant at $p \leq .001$; **Significant at $p \leq .01$; * Significant at $p \leq .05$

As for the control variables, substantial religious affiliation differences were observed. Catholics, Protestants and Jews expressed less willingness to date Blacks than persons with no religious affiliation. The coefficients for persons of other religious affiliations did not reach statistical significance by conventional criteria. Women were nearly 14% less likely to support dating African Americans than their male counterparts. Educational attainment made no difference in willingness to date African Americans, with the exception of respondents with some college education who had less favorable attitudes toward dating African Americans than their high school counterparts. Respondents that identified themselves as homosexual were 6% more likely to prefer dating African Americans than their heterosexual counterparts. Analysis also demonstrated significant disparities in Black dating desires by political views. Respondents who described themselves as liberal were over 2 times as likely to wish to date Blacks as those that identified themselves as conservative. Similarly, persons that were middle of the road were 34% more likely to have positive attitudes toward Black dating than conservatives. Individuals with other types of political views were also more than twice as likely to favor dating Blacks as were conservatives. Respondents residing in Southern states were nearly 44% less likely to express a desire to date African Americans than their counterparts living in the West. Living in the Midwest and Northeast had no impact on the log odds of Black dating preference.

The second model in Table 2 presents findings on the effects of the covariates on willingness to date whites. As depicted in the model, Asians were nearly 2.3 times more likely to favor dating whites than Hispanic respondents (OR=2.29, CI=1.52-3.45). African Americans were over 78% less likely to express willingness to date whites than Hispanics (OR=0.21, CI=.16-.27). The coefficient for mixed race persons did not reach statistical significance. No generational differences were observed in attitudes in support of white dating.

Females were over 48% less likely to prefer dating whites than their male counterparts (OR=.516, CI=.433-.615). Homosexual respondents were 1.3 times as likely to express interest in dating whites as heterosexuals. No significant educational differentials were found among respondents in willingness to date whites. Survey respondents that described themselves

as middle of the road with regard to political views were nearly 1.6 times as likely to favor dating whites as their conservative counterparts. Those who identified themselves as liberal were 31% more likely to show willingness in dating whites than conservatives. No significant religious disparities were found among respondents in white dating preference. As for region of residence, respondents in the South were much less willing to date whites than respondents in the West (OR=.48, CI=.379-.60). Likewise, persons in the Midwest were over 38% less likely to have white dating preference than those in the West. Similarly, Northeasterners had odds of white dating preference that were over 36% lower than those of Westerners (OR=.638, CI=.492-.829).

Relevant findings on the impact of the covariates on the log odds of dating persons of Hispanic origin are shown in Table 3 (model 3). As may be seen, African American respondents were over 1.9 times more likely to prefer dating Hispanics than were Asians (OR=1.96, CI=1.62-2.37). Persons of mixed race were 2.7 times as likely to prefer Hispanic dating as Asian respondents (OR=2.70, CI=2.21-3.28). The effect of white race was not significant. When generations were considered, Silent Generation members were generally unwilling to date Hispanics (OR=.41, CI=.29-.59). The effects of other generations did not reach statistical significance.

Females were less favorable to Hispanic dating than males, but homosexual respondents were nearly 60% more likely to prefer dating Hispanics than heterosexuals. No significant educational differences were observed in Hispanic dating preference, but there were substantial disparities based on political views. Liberals were over 87% more likely to favor dating Hispanics than conservatives, and middle of the road respondents were nearly 39% as likely to support Hispanic dating as conservatives. Persons with other political affiliations were nearly 1.8 times as likely to prefer Hispanic dating as conservatives. Results showed that in terms of religious affiliation, Jewish respondents were less willing to date Hispanics than those without religious affiliation. Finally, respondents in the South, those in the Midwest, and persons residing in the Northeast of the country were all significantly resistant to Hispanic dating.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results of the Effects of Race/Ethnicity and Generation on the Willingness to Date Hispanics and Asians

Model 3 Willing to Date Hispanics				Model 4 Willing to Date Asians			
Covariates	b	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Covariates	b	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Race / Ethnicity				Race / Ethnicity			
Asian		1.00		Black		1.00	
White	0.02	1.02	0.87,1.20	White	-0.10	0.90	0.79,1.03
Black	0.67***	1.96	1.62,2.37	Hispanic	-0.01	0.98	0.84,1.16
Multiple Race	0.99***	2.70	2.21,3.86	Multiple Race	0.28***	1.32	1.13,1.54
Generation				Generation			
Millennium		1.00		Millennium		1.00	
Silent	-0.87***	0.42	0.29,0.59	Silent	-0.79***	0.45	0.33,0.63
Baby Boomer	-0.17	0.85	0.66,1.09	Baby Boomer	-0.32**	0.73	0.59,0.90
Gen X	0.10	1.10	0.87,1.39	Gen X	-0.10	0.91	0.75,1.11
Sex				Sex			
Male		1.00		Male		1.00	
Female	-0.87***	0.42	0.37,0.47	Female	-0.72***	0.49	0.44,0.54
Sexual Orientation				Sexual Orientation		1.00	
Heterosexual		1.00		Heterosexual		1.00	
Homosexual	0.47***	1.60	1.40,1.82	Homosexual	-0.16**	0.85	0.76,0.95
Level of Education				Level of Education			
High School		1.00		High School		1.00	
Some College	-0.07	0.93	0.74,1.17	Some College	-0.12	0.89	0.74,1.07
College	0.00	1.00	0.79,1.28	College	-0.04	0.97	0.76,1.17
Graduate	0.00	1.00	0.78,1.30	Graduate	-0.01	.099	0.81,1.22
Political Orientation				Political Orientation			
Conservative		1.00		Conservative		1.00	
Moderate	0.33***	1.39	1.17,1.65	Moderate	0.20**	1.22	1.04,1.42
Liberal	0.63***	1.88	1.55,2.27	Liberal	0.48***	1.62	1.37,1.92
Other	0.56***	1.76	1.39,2.23	Other	0.46***	1.58	1.30,1.94
Religious Affiliation				Religious Affiliation			
No Religion		1.00		No Religion		1.00	
Catholic	-0.04	0.96	0.72,1.30	Catholic	-0.47***	0.63	0.47,0.83
Protestant	-0.22	0.80	0.59,1.08	Protestant	-0.60***	0.55	0.41,0.74
Jewish	-0.67**	0.51	0.31,0.85	Jewish	-0.90***	0.41	0.25,0.67
Other Religion	0.07	1.08	0.82,1.42	Other Religion	-0.31*	0.73	0.56,0.96
Region of Residence				Region of Residence			
West		1.00		West		1.00	
South	-0.53***	0.59	0.51,0.68	South	-0.44***	0.64	0.57,0.73
Midwest	-0.36***	0.70	0.59,0.83	Midwest	-0.29***	0.75	0.65,0.86
Northeast	-0.20*	0.82	0.70,0.97	Northeast	-0.16*	0.85	0.74,0.98
-2 Log Likelihood	7314.537				9295.849		
Model χ^2 / df	742.496*** / 21				443.825*** / 21		
Number of Events / Observations	5311 / 7115				4512 / 7316		

*** Significant at $p \leq .001$; **Significant at $p \leq .01$; * Significant at $p \leq .05$

Finally, relevant logistic regression results on the effects of the predictor variables on willingness to date Asians are presented in model 4 of Table 3. As shown in the model, the only racial/ethnic covariate that sustained statistical significance was multiple races (mixed race). Respondents with that characteristic were 1.3 times more likely to prefer dating Asians than were African Americans. Members of the Silent Generation as well as Baby-boomers were considerably less likely to prefer Asian dating than members of the Millennium Generation.

Female respondents were much less willing to date Asians than male respondents. Homosexual individuals were over 15% less likely to prefer dating Asians than their heterosexual counterparts. No significant differentials were observed in terms of education attainment. Liberals had odds of dating Asians that were over 1.6 times those of conservatives ($OR=1.61$, $CI=1.36-1.91$). Likewise respondents that described themselves as middle of the road on political attitudes were nearly 22% as likely to prefer dating Asians as conservatives. When religious affiliation was considered, findings revealed that Catholics, Protestants, Jews, as well as persons with other religious affiliations were all less willing to date Asians than respondents without religious affiliation. Respondents residing in the South, Midwest, and Northeast United States were all much less willing to date Asians than were their counterparts in the West.

Discussion

The primary objectives of the study were to examine racial/ethnic differences in dating preferences and to investigate dating preferences between birth cohorts (generations). Since overt racism was a fixture for older cohorts, it was hypothesized that older cohort members would be less willing to date outside their own race or ethnicity than would their younger counterparts. The findings confirmed this hypothesis. For instance, members of the oldest generation (Silent Generation) were consistently less willing to date anyone outside their racial group, except when whites were the response variable. Results add credence to Mannheim's ([1928] 1952) argument that individuals tend to be sensitive to critical events that occur during their formative years, which may then ultimately shape a generational outlook that persists through the life course. Children and young adults, both whites and nonwhites alike, who were raised during earlier epochs (e.g. Silent Generation members) were often instilled with a sense of group position or identity. This sense of difference between

groups was heightened by structural inequality and racial oppression and segregation. The attitudes and behaviors that characterized the era actively promoted racial homophily in the primary or private sphere of social life (Kalmijn 1998). Consequently, as argued by Mannheim, older individuals may interpret and respond to new racialized situations by using perspectives that were developed decades ago. It is important to note, however, that it is unknown whether younger generations (e.g. Generations X and Millennium) might exhibit similar dating preferences when they become older.

The analyses also supported the hypothesis of significant disparities in dating preferences by race. In general, whites and Asians were less open to dating African Americans, and African Americans were resistant to dating whites. Asians preferred dating whites, while African Americans were supportive of dating Hispanics. Persons of multiple race backgrounds were willing to date any race, except whites.

Analysis found significant regional race dating preferences. Persons living in the South were less willing to date someone of a different race or ethnicity than those who live in the West. Consistent with Mannheim's notion that generational identity formation is also place-specific rather than just age-specific, individuals from the South were less willing to date African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans than were their Western counterparts. This particular finding was somewhat expected since prejudice and discrimination in the South were acutely prevalent and well-accepted during the Jim Crow era. Residential segregation in the South significantly reduced or eliminated opportunities to have any meaningful social contact with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. People of color were socially and culturally isolated from whites—racial propinquity was at an all time low. Although many decades have elapsed since the end of Jim Crow, and the South, like other regions of the country is experiencing both internal and international migration, it may well be that a significant number of older adults living there are influenced by historic racial biases. If true, the value priorities constructed during their formative years would continue to flourish even in the 21st century. It is important to note that the data used in this study only indicated current place of residence and did not specify the region of the country in which the respondent grew up. That said, however, as a region, the South continues to experience racial tension that can affect present racial dating preferences.

There were a number of intriguing findings surrounding the various socio-demographic variables that

were used in the study. For example, analyses revealed significant differences in partner choices based on one's sexual orientation. Homosexuals were more willing to date whites and Hispanics, but less willing to date Asians. Past studies tend to document that race and physical attractiveness are critical characteristics in mate selection among gay men (Phua and Kaufman 2003; Sergio and Cody 1985). Unfortunately, however, the media often depicts men of color as being less attractive dating partners. For example, Asian men are consistently characterized as being asexual or highly effeminate (Fujino 1997). At the same time, black men are habitually portrayed as being "thuggish" rather than sophisticated and handsome (Entman and Rojecki 2000). These unflattering mediated images may condition individuals to view certain racial groups as being undesirable. Research has also routinely shown that many Asians and African Americans internalize these racist beliefs and often rate their own racial group as being less attractive than whites (Fujino 1997; Liu et al 1995).

Analyses showed that women were consistently less willing to date outside their races than were men. This is consistent with past research that suggests that young women, regardless of race, are often pressured by their parents and friends to date within their own racial or ethnic group (Childs 2002; Miller, Olsen, and Fazio 2004). Breaking this racialized norm may lead to such consequences as being negatively stigmatized or marginalized (Dalmage 2006). For example, women of color who date interracially are often accused by their peers of turning their backs on their own racial identity or culture (Child 2002). White women also face a similar backlash. According to Dalmage (2006: 153), "A white person who crosses the color line threatens the assumption that racial superiority is essential to whites. The interracially involved white person is thus often re-categorized as inherently flawed—as 'polluted.'" With such intense pressure to conform to prescribed racial rules, it is not surprising that women tend to hold more negative attitudes toward interracial romantic relationships than do men (Mills et al. 1995).

Although most research documents that education has a positive impact on interracial tolerance and inter-marriage rates (e.g., Heaton and Jacobson 2000; Yancey

2002) the present results did not reveal any significant relationship between education and willingness to cross the color-line when selecting a dating partner.

As for the role of political orientation in dating preferences, results suggest that people who have a liberal or at least middle of the road outlook tend to be more willing to cross the color-line when selecting a potential dating partner than are more conservative individuals. This particular pattern was consistent across all racial groups.

The present study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, although it examined cohort differences in interracial dating patterns under the lenses of Mannheim's theory of generation, the dataset did not allow for a direct test of this particular framework. There were no available questions on the *Match.com* survey that assessed the respondents' attitudes about race-related issues such as legalized segregation or the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, there were no questions that directly asked participants about their attitudes on interracial relationships. The second limitation is that the sample used is not nationally representative. Accordingly, there might be differential selection by generations. It is plausible that internet daters are a unique group and that the phenomenon (online dating) is more widespread among 18–24 years olds than persons aged 60 and above. Readers are urged to read the results judiciously, and to recognize that findings reported in the study may not be generalized to the non-internet dating population. Finally, attitudes do not necessarily predict actual behavior, and an individual that indicates willingness to date someone of another race may not do so even when presented with the opportunity.

Despite the above limitations, results present evidence to suggest that race remains a potent and sensitive issue in some segments of American society. Findings document that older adults are more likely to date within their own racial or ethnic group than are younger adults. Studies should continue to empirically investigate the nexus between significant historical events and their subsequent impact on attitudes and behaviors on interracial relationships. We cannot disregard the notion that we really are the product of our times, and that our racial outlook may be shaped by what we collectively experience during our formative years.

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